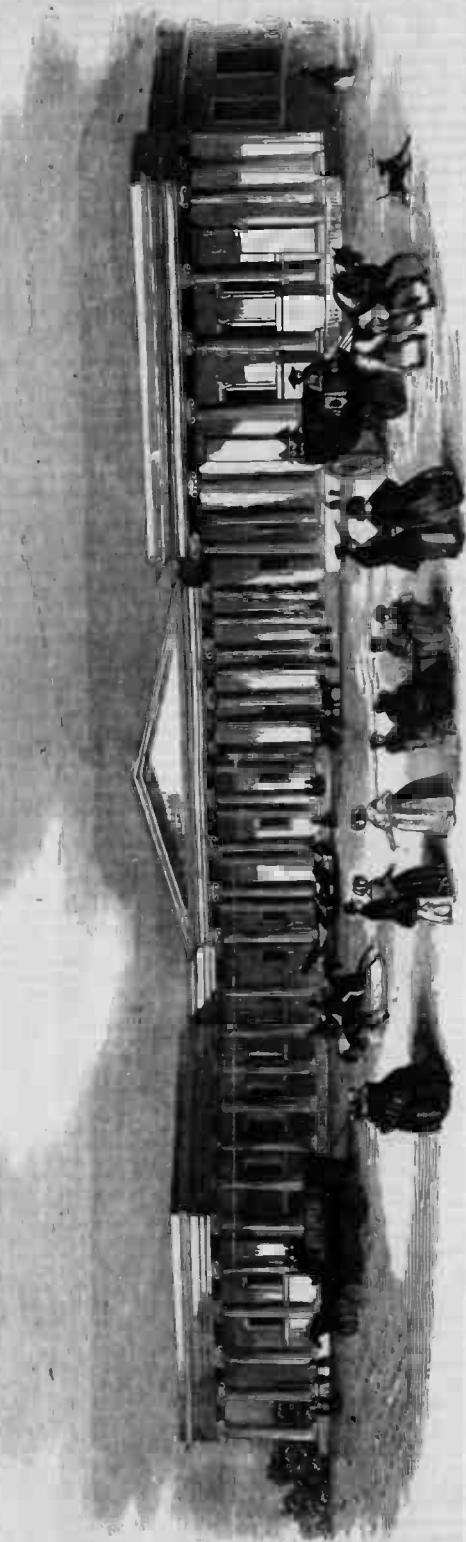




FACADE OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

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We have decided, after much conflict, not to proceed further in this business than by presenting the view, enlarged from the published copy, of Sir Robert Smirke's elevation of the Museum, and to follow it up with the plan. It is this plan that has subdued all the little of that spirit to carp and criticism which a first view of that of the façade and of the elevation engendered in us. Not that we think any thing the better of the elevation, after all; but somehow we are struck with a sense of profanity in baiting and taking to task the possessor of that mind whose evidence of talent is not alone in the grand general plan of the Museum, although there were enough in this, but in a reputation sketched out on many previous works of eminently fine disposition and arrangement, and which mind is surrounded by the bright halo of a high character for Integrity, industry, and gentlemanly bearing. No, we must part with our right hand before it can pander to the attack on a noble and generous nature—and that such is Sir Robert's, we are well convinced, or the plan of the British Museum is a forgery.

The letter to justify us in all we have said, and now say, it may be as well to explain that we have no personal knowledge of Sir Robert Smirke—we know not that we ever saw him. We need not disclaim expectancies; we are not in the way of such, nor dependent on them. Our paper, whatever may be its demerits in any other respect, and whatever our own, is not, so long as it is ours, to be disgraced by servile dependencies; therefore, it will be understood that, right or wrong, our convictions are honestly made up, and these convictions are that we should be doing an injustice to fall in with the cry of *unqualified demerits*, nay, to join in that which would affirm as much as, that great talent, great judgment, and a rare assemblage of eminent qualities as an architect and a man of business, had not reigned supremely in the mind of SMIRKE when he concocted and while he directed the plan and execution of the works of the British Museum.

Again we say, we are not in love with—we are not thoroughly pleased with—the exterior character which Sir Robert has given to his building; we will say, without knowing him, that there is more of hypocrisy in it than there is in himself; it is a mannerism of times recent and times present; it is a bastard product of classic fancy, a false face (though a fair one) put on a noble carcase; yes, it is the carcase that redeems it, or rather redeems the misappropriation.

But would the public, the discriminating public, be pleased with a truer face? Would they so well dispense with the agreeable mask? We know not. Show they will have, pompous and pedantic though it be. Elevations all mimetic, whether at the Museum of Russell-street, or the "New Palace" of Westminster; the facile transposition of an attic colonnade obtains their applause, though it serve duty in front of a trustee's parlour or a keeper's sleeping-rooms, just as much so as Gothic garnitures that encase committee-rooms, or still more ignoble apartments. The good public crave a style! That of the Post Office was *wonderfully fine* in its day, but it has lived out in the short life of realization in the British Museum. So we fear that a brief age will say as much for the appropriation in the Parliament Houses; but are Smirke and Barry less the men of leading mind for that? Measure them both, we say, by their plans—it is in their utilitarianism they shine. Who expects, in an age of cold craft of that ilk, to meet with graces and adornments? It is not in the nature of such times, and of the people born in them, to be marked with such. Strike off the fetters of "style," or seal the mouth against the cant of it, and "a soul will be created under the ribs of death."

Have we then no suggestions to offer? We will attempt to bear with ourselves while we do something in this way in accompaniment of the Plan.